

Book Reviews

The Young as Outsiders

Youth: Transition to Adulthood. Report of the Panel on Youth of the President's Science Advisory Committee. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1974. viii, 194 pp. Cloth, \$8.50; paper, \$1.95.

School Review. Vol. 83, No. 1 (Nov. 1974), Symposium on *Youth: Transition to Adulthood*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1974. 178 pp. Paper, \$3; to institutions, \$3.75.

Life transitions are often difficult, and none has been more difficult for large numbers of contemporary Americans than that from childhood to full adult status. The purposes of the report by the Panel on Youth are succinctly stated: "To examine the contexts that now exist for youth, within which they come to adulthood, and assess the fitness of those contexts for the accomplishment of the development necessary to full maturity, and then to propose alternative settings that seem to be preferable ways of accomplishing that assignment." The report is, then, both a distillation of what is known from research and a set of policy recommendations.

The panel was convened and chaired by James Coleman, whose early study of high school climates (*The Adolescent Society*, Free Press, 1961) first focused widespread attention on the adolescent peer society as a semiautonomous social world, with its unique set of activities and values. The term "youth," once synonymous with "adolescence," has in recent years been extended to include the early adult years; the panel's analysis focuses on the age group 14 through 24. The panel's basic premise, stated at the outset, can be paraphrased as follows: We have come to depend much too heavily on schools and schooling as the primary institutional form within which youth come to maturity. Moreover, the family is seen as having limited effectiveness beyond childhood, and the peer group is an unsuitable

source for development toward adult goals since it attenuates communication and culture transmission across generational lines. Therefore the panel looks to other institutions for new alternatives, particularly within the world of work.

More than two-thirds of the report consists of a series of brief background papers prepared by individual members of the panel. In general, these papers are superbly done. They clearly sketch the salient historical trends and features of the current situation of youth. One major trend has been the shift from apprenticeship learning in settings containing a wide range of ages to professionally oriented learning within school settings containing an ever narrower range of ages.

The early years of the century brought the institutionalization of adolescence. With it came legislation for the protection of children and younger adolescents from exploitation. But, as in the case of laws designed to protect women from exploitation, the laws to protect children and adolescents served to wall off opportunities and became a basis for exclusion from productive work. With gradual raising of the age for compulsory education and the closing off of job opportunities for adolescents, the proportion in school has gone from 15 percent in 1910 to more than 90 percent today.

Between 1960 and 1970 an added pressure was placed on secondary schools. Thanks to the postwar baby boom, in a decade the age group 14 through 24 grew by more than 14 million members—more than the total increase in this age group in the previous 60 years. Most of this expansion was absorbed by the schools. One answer to the press for more secondary education has been the trend to larger and larger schools, brought about by consolidation of schools and school districts. Another has been increasing standardization; specialization among secondary

schools has almost ceased, and today the public comprehensive high school prevails throughout America.

Adolescents have almost no control over the curriculum available to them and no alternative to school despite the fact that the school year has lengthened, decade after decade. Not surprisingly, such trends have accentuated the crisis in institutional legitimacy of secondary schools for the urban lower class. Moreover, as schools have become more and more the focus of adolescent life, the youth culture has flourished. Its basic features include psychic attachment to peers (looking to peers as the model in dress, entertainment, music, and life style generally), a press toward autonomy, concern for the underdog, and an interest in change rather than in the stability of the social order. These features tend to wall youth off from the larger society and to contrast with the values and interest of the adult community.

The paramount issues, as the panel sees them, derive from the increasing segregation of youth from both children and adults, which makes them less responsive and less responsible in relation to the larger society, and from the limiting of options available to contemporary youth. Apart from school, youth have new options in consumption and leisure, but these require a measure of affluence. Further, they do not nurture responsibility. Youth tend to be excluded from challenging jobs both by the humanitarian considerations that protect them from exploitation and by the increasing professionalization and bureaucratization of jobs. Youth are, then, to a considerable degree "outsiders" in American society.

The panel's formal recommendations are presented as a basis for discussion and debate and as proposals for experimental programs to be developed and studied. The recommendations are only sketchily developed. Three are designed primarily to counter the current age segregation and homogeneity of educational experience of youth. These entail a call for greater diversity within the secondary schools—a return to specialized schools, to smaller educational units, to role diversity in the schools, and to using the school as an agent for the young; alternation of school and work, either through sequential periods of school and work or through combining education and on-the-job training; and the incorporation of youth within work organizations that will

combine learning, working, and even teaching. Other recommendations include experimentation with youth communities and organizations; review of the restrictions on the employment of youth posed by existing legislation such as compulsory education laws, laws prohibiting the employment of youth in certain kinds of work, and even the minimum wage laws; provision of vouchers to youth over the age of 16 to permit free choice of the kind of training or education desired and thereby equalize the subsidization of education and training; the creation of markedly expanded opportunities for public service as in the Peace Corps or Vista; and, finally, a systematic program of research both on the incorporation of youth into the larger society and on the institutions serving youth.

The special symposium issue of the *School Review* devoted to the report of the Panel on Youth presents a dozen commentaries on the report and a brief response by Coleman. Represented here are educators, economists, psychologists, sociologists, and a senator. Their views are as diverse as is the composition of the group. Robert Havighurst sees the panel's report as a basis for discussion and fruitful planning during the next decade and deplores the failure of the media to give it wide coverage. Senator Mondale's brief comments on the need for greater legislative attention to problems of children and youth take as their point of reference the family, an institution that the Coleman panel had intentionally ignored.

Several of the reviewers carry the analysis of the panel a step further. Trow addresses the problem of attempting to increase diversity in the schools and allowing freedom of choice in the face of pressures for mandated racial integration. Freedom of choice, coupled with differences in information, interest, and resources, would lead to grossly different choices by the favored and the deprived. Where schools are really different, Trow notes, some will inevitably be more prized than others. Thus one proposed policy change runs squarely into conflict with a recently established policy.

Baumrind questions whether many of the panel's proposals are workable in our competitive, pluralistic society, currently unable to deal effectively with the more pressing problems of unemployment, inflation, and energy. She also touches on a basic flaw in our socialization apparatus for both chil-

dren and youth—the failure to give them a sense of obligation to their society and to set authoritative guidelines for them. Boocock compares the status of youth in America with their counterparts in Israel and China. Those societies demand responsible performance by youth but give far less choice than does American society. Individuated choice and high autonomy may indeed not be the best means of mobilizing the energies and idealism of youth in meaningful activities.

Most of the symposium participants accept the premises of the panel, but a good many voice dissatisfaction with the recommendations. Some chide the panel for having failed to deal adequately with race and social class differences and their implications. Others argue that the world of work hardly offers a preferable alternative to youth alienated from the schools; they view workers in contemporary America as even more alienated than students. A few of the participants do question the premises of the panel, and one or two seem to doubt that a serious problem exists. The diversity of opinion is a manifestation of the dilemma facing any panel of experts addressing a social problem: how much can one take for granted in the way of shared perspectives and values and how much has to be spelled out before one begins one's analysis?

The panel did not, for the most part, make explicit their general values or their goals for youth (beyond more age integration and more opportunity to develop responsibility). They opted for a relatively narrow focus, excluding the consideration of the family, of social differentiation (by sex, class, and ethnic group, and of the moral climate of the society as viewed by youth. To deal with these topics would have enormously increased the task of analysis and hopelessly extended the scope of recommendations.

Realistically, the transitional problems of youth cannot be dealt with in isolation from other problems relating to the integration of individuals and groups in our society. Many of the problems of adolescents derive from the kind of socialization our children are receiving. And many of the problems of youth are not resolved at 30 or even 40. Youth and the aged present a number of similarities in the social positions they occupy and in the transitions they face, as Matilda Riley notes in one of the symposium papers.

Necessary as it may have been to focus attention on existing institutional structures and to eschew the systematic analysis of values and moral issues in developing recommendations for governmental action, the choice has decided disadvantages if one is seeking fully to understand the current position of youth. It is precisely the lack of shared moral commitment that is at the root of the dissatisfactions and alienation of many youth.

Coleman and his associates recognized that they did not have answers to the central problems of youth in American society. They have suggested some possible first steps toward dealing with the issues they identified. In his response to the commentaries in the *School Review* Coleman expresses the view that the recommendations are probably the least valuable part of the report. The analyses of the place of youth in the institutional structure and of the issues earlier discussed seem to him far more important accomplishments. This reviewer agrees.

The recasting of public policy obviously requires more than accurate information; it requires assessment of the problematics of change, and of the potential costs and benefits to various groups of implementing new policies. Even modest efforts to counter current trends are likely to arouse strong sentiments in opposition unless representatives of the several institutions involved can debate the issues and take part in planning the proposed changes. The achievement of planned change will always entail a dialectic and take time unless the plans happen to coincide with a change that is already under way.

There is room for other analyses that take a more developmental view, or that inquire into ways that families might be assisted to demand more responsibility from children and adolescents, or that consider whether we can indefinitely subscribe to the notion that everyone should be free to "do his own thing." The report of the Panel on Youth is circumscribed, but it clearly indicates the need for redesigning social roles for youth and reshaping some of the institutional structures within which youth move to adulthood. It contains some sketches, if not working drawings, of new features worth developing in greater detail and trying out.

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